

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: RURAL DECAY ALMANAC

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Rural Decay Almanac is an exhibition comprised of sculptural objects and video/sound documentation. The following is an explanation of inspiration and personal history, a proposed schematic/manual for the objects in the gallery, and other contemporary artists I frame myself within. The front half of The Art Gallery at the University of Maryland as well as the atrium space directly outside the gallery hosts the work: four large scale Site-Responsive sculptural objects, and one video/sound loop projection. The library of materials comes from a farm site in Ijamsville, MD which has been re-purposed into the structures. As a sister work, the process of dismantling documentation is shown alongside the objects in a sound/video installation. The gallery space is transformed into a meticulously controlled environment via hard objects, sound, light, and video.

RURAL DECAY ALMANAC

By

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Chapter 1: Homesteading

In the 1970's my mother moved into her father's hunting cabin on a 200 acre plot of land in upstate New York. She met my father just up the road at a hippy farm where recent RPI Architecture graduates had a few sheep and a stack of firewood. Like many people of their time, they wanted to homestead. They had six kids - three girls followed by three boys - Bayly Mae, Laney Rae, Carey Jane, Chase Rudisill, Dane Rudisill (me), and Rudy Gabel. Although their marriage didn't last long past Rudy, we were all raised equally by the two of them on the farmyard. Aside from digging holes and shoveling shit, there were countless valuable lessons to be learned - most of which I was unaware of until I moved away from the rural landscape. My mother wanted us to learn about the importance of humbled self sufficiency. We learned about growing a garden, taking care of animals, and maintaining the land while enjoying what it had to offer. In the end we'll all need to be farmers once again.

The farmyard landscape has been churning in my thoughts since my early years. By comparing and contrasting notions and materials from the simplest form of 'the barn' with fragments of industry and the cosmopolitan

environment, I'm able to consider where I frame my life and work. Being aware of the fluctuating audience in these spaces, my work involves many different forms of comparisons to the farmyard; the white-cube gallery, the public outdoor environment, brutalist architecture, and even some more intangible arenas - celestial, or imagined. The use of nostalgic sentiments from my childhood as a conceptual springboard allows me to position these ideas in a new context, removed from the original site. The reference to these memories is intentionally ambiguous in the finished product, but not buried. As they are a starting point for my process, these recollections act as an entrance for the audience. To the metropolitan, these memories are peculiar and sometimes morbid in some sense, yet not un-relatable. A strange autonomy through the objects in the space is evoked with viewer interaction - whether physical or mental.

The barn or - *A barn - ANY barn* - is loaded with conceptual and narrative baggage. In every layer of paint, every bent nail, and every scar in the lumber there lies an instance in history. Every smell that has ever fumed the barn is in the boards, and every material to ever touch the lumber has left some kind of patina. The interior has never seen real light or water, while

the tin roofing has been bleached by intense sun, sleet, rain, and snow.

The rural landscape of America is littered with dilapidated barns; collapsing on top of abandoned animal homes and piles of decomposed straw or hay. Their timeline is determined by their care and construction. Their history is told through their scars and collections of detritus; torn up hoses and extension cords, parts of old hand tools that have seized shut, animal carcasses that have degraded to leather and bone, broken glass, shelves full of grease gun reloads, empty nests made from faded tarp fibers, mason jars with rusty nails in them, barrells of mystery oil, crumbled roofing shingles, and remnants half finished projects.

The mysterious history of the site is the unknown factor of the project. This idea is transferred from the barn to the gallery space through the finished objects. Just as I did while I dismantled barn, the viewer will create their own story. The sculptures in their materiality call to some kind of function, left unexplained - open to ponder.

I spent an entire day removing trash and debris from the barn before I could take it apart. There was a work table with a vise on it at the south end and I wondered whose it was and what they built in there. The electrical

cord giving the structure power had been chewed in half by some creature. Many times I tripped over large animal holes dug into the earth foundation, overturning non-descript carcasses of skin and bone.

I dismantled the barn on March 30th, the first warm day of the new year. I recalled projects my brother and I were proudly in charge of on the farm growing up. The barn had hand-made blacksmithed nails holding the oak and hickory planks to the frame, and the new owners of the property had guessed it was around 100 years old. One day of one person's work un-did 100 years of history leaving nothing but a flat surface of dry, dusty dirt.



Figure 1. The Site, Ijamesville, MD, 2016

Chapter 2. Schematics/Object Manual

Almanac is a large wheel-like structure with different scale circles on either end, causing it to taper into a slightly conical shape. The larger ring is 105 inches in diameter while the smaller ring is 100 inches. It is five feet long, constructed fully of rough sawn oak. The outside circles are supported with five radial spokes, giving it strength against compression. Each ring is made up of 66 individually cut pieces. The sheathed surface is also made up of 66 boards, tapering over their five foot length with a difference of $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch on either side from five inches to 4.75 inches. Like a trundle wheel - a contractor tool used for measuring distances dating back to the 17th century - *Almanac* maps out a circle on a large plot of land. On flat ground, the ring it makes would be 200 feet in diameter and 628 feet in circumference. The track of sheet metal roofing material depicts this line.

The trundle wheel uses its circumference as a unit for measure - each time the ring does one revolution, the distance travelled is equal to the circumference of the ring. This is a rudimentary measuring tool that provides a rough estimate of distance. In the gallery, *Almanac* suggests a space - perhaps outdoor - physically penetrating the white-cube and

marrying the outside with interior space. The term Almanac is referenced here as a published notice of information regarding the orbit, phases, and timeline of the sun, moon, and other celestial bodies. The Almanac helps farmers with things like weather forecasts, planting dates, and tide tables. The object in the gallery is meant to reference a sense of measure, mapping out a space bigger than the gallery, even connected to an orbital map suggested in the cosmos.



Figure 2. *Almanac*, 9' x 9' x 5' (object) rough sawn barn lumber, tin roofing, 2016.

Azimuth is another wheel-like structure, smaller in scale, yet with a much larger taper, making it more conical in shape. The larger ring at the bottom of the form is 80.05 inches in diameter, tapered at 30° - it's made up of 32 pieces at seven and $\frac{7}{8}$ inches wide cut to a compound miter. The sheathing then angles off of the larger ring at 22.5° to a smaller ring 44.27 inches in diameter - also tapered at 22.5° and made up of 32 pieces at 4.34 inches wide cut to a compound miter. There are 62 sheathing boards in between the two rings - making the taper of the form - mitered, and tapered over 44.5 inches with a difference of $\frac{7}{8}$ of an inch on either side from four inches at the wider side and to two and $\frac{1}{4}$ inches at the smaller.

An Azimuth is an angular measurement in a spherical coordinate system. The vector from an observer (origin) to a point of interest is projected perpendicularly onto a reference plane; the angle between the projected vector and the reference vector is called the Azimuth. A good example of this is the position of a selected star in the sky... the star is the point of interest, the reference point is the horizon, and the reference vector

points north. The azimuth here is the angle between the north vector and the projection of the point of interest (the star) onto the horizon. This concept is used primarily in navigation, but also in engineering and mapping.

In the gallery, *Azimuth* has seemingly spun it's course - a 14 foot diameter - leaving a trail of dirt behind. It's function, although peculiar, is to tumble dirt inside the vessel as it spins around its axis, funneling it out onto the ground. A reference to agriculture and farming lies in the connection to crops and irrigation systems, specifically the mark they leave on the ground, as if they are unknowingly some kind of drawing machine. Dirt collected from the original site of the barn has been transported to the gallery. The scar the barn left in the earth has been transformed into the mark the new object makes in the gallery.



Figure 3. *Azimuth*, 7' x 7' x 5'(object) rough sawn barn lumber, earth, 2016

Gnomon is the third structure in the space made of an upright wheel in a frame coiling a rope that penetrates the gallery wall. The rope then loops over a concrete beam in the atrium space directly outside of the gallery, suspending a horizontal wheel. The upright wheel is 7.5 feet in diameter on a steel axle in a seven foot by six and a half foot A-frame system. The suspended wheel in the atrium - hung at 20 feet high - is nine feet in diameter. The bottom ring is oriented flat and angles out which supports a second vertical ring angling in off of it. The strength of this circle comes from its cross grain formation. The one inch diameter manilla rope is wrapped around the vertical wheel and anchored to the A-frame base.

A Gnomon is the vertical part of a sundial that casts a shadow. These naturally occur as a time-telling device. Anything that casts a shadow uses its own physical mass in relation to the arch and orbit of the earth around the sun, 93 million miles away. Similarly, the two objects comprising the sculpture are dependent on one another, in terms of anchoring weight and balance. The suspended form in the atrium acts as a lure to the rest of the exhibition.



Figure 4. *Gnomon*, 8' x 6' x 7' (upright wheel) 1.5' x 9' x 9' (suspended wheel) rough sawn barn lumber, fabricated steel, manilla rope, 2016

Cartographer is a 15 minute video loop archiving the one-day dismantle of the barn in Ijamesville. The sounds from the labor are projected into the gallery; hammering, prying, creaking, and scuffing. The projection is secluded from the objects and meant to be seen after experiencing the forms. As the viewer gets closer to the end of the space, the sounds of labor get louder, and lures their attention towards the projection screen. Rather than just a documentation or how-to, the video focuses in on specifics related to the site - how the light changed inside and out as the barn came down, the sounds that filled the surrounding area, and perspectival views that show the setting in different angles making for intriguing shots. It is not necessary that the audience makes the material connection between the objects they encountered, and the structure in the video, but rather that they approach the video as a stand-in for every barn like this across the American landscape. As the performer in the video, I take on the roll of a *Cartographer* of sorts, turning the barn into objects that map out future spaces.

The video loop starts out with a sound byte sampled from *The Voyager Interstellar Record* aboard the space probe Voyager 2. The

Voyager 2 was launched in 1977 to study our solar system. It is the furthest man-made object away from our planet, and in 2012 it was 14.7 billion kilometers away travelling at approximately 35,000 miles per hour. *The Voyager Interstellar Record* is just one of many things aboard the ship to represent humans to any extraterrestrial life that it might find. The record is gold plated with 31 tracks ranging from love songs from Papua New Guinea, to Louis Armstrong and His Hot Seven. The record starts with this speech by Secretary General of the United Nations, Austrian Kurt Waldheim.

On top of the gold-plated record there is also an ultra pure sample of the isotope uranium-238, which has a half life of 4.468 billion years. This makes it possible for any civilization who may find it within this time to be able to tell the age of the record by using the ratio of the remaining uranium in comparison to other elements.



Figure 5. *Cartographer*, dimensions variable, video and sound projection loop, 2016

Chapter 3: Contemporaries

Just as important as knowing your audience is knowing your colleagues and contemporaries - artists who have, or currently are working in the same vein. One artist I place my ideas among is Gordon Matta Clark, specifically his 1974 piece 'Splitting'. For this work, Clark made a single cut all the way through the center of a house with a saws-all. He then jacks up one side of the structure and adds stones to the foundation, so that it feels as though the house is falling apart at the seam. The entire process was documented via video. The work is completed with it's amazing gleam of sunlight that peers through to the inside.



Figure 6. *Splitting*, Gordon Matta-Clark, Video Still, 1974

Mostly what I borrowed from Clark's ideas come from his coined term of "anarchitecture" - meaning a temporary intervention with already existing structures. I feel I'm using this notion and taking it a step further by turning the structure into a new object.

I've always been very interested in the transformation out of minimalism in the 60's and 70's to less standard nonart ideas. Artists like Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, Walter DeMaria, Mary Miss, Alice Aycock, and Michael Heizer (to name a few) were thrilled in this time about objects and ideas existing outside of the white-cube gallery space. Monumental in scale and without distractions from the occupied cityscape, these works were truly experiential. Michael Heizer once said of his work -

"There are no values attached to something like this... you can't trade this thing, you can't put it in your pocket, if there's a war you can't move it, it's not worth anything, in fact it's an obligation", a fairly profound thought on art objects of this time. I feel my work and thoughts can (and should) exist on both planes - transforming the 'outside world' with gallery works and considering indoor exhibition spaces while building and sourcing outdoors. *Rural Decay Almanac* is a series of objects and video thinking

about both of these environments and the conditions withheld -the differences in climate, culture, sounds, and the light... How do the two worlds interact?

In her 1979 published text *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, Rosalind Krauss explains the move of artists in the 60's and 70's into land art. She goes on to explain the concept of architecture/not-architecture, and landscape/not-landscape. Her claim is that the minimalists of the 60's had coined sculpture into either a non-architecture or non-landscape realm, what Kraus called a negative response to modernist sculpture. Modernist sculpture (statues) on pedestals used to place themselves in either landscape or architecture. The minimalists of the 1960's began to set the work aside from those notions in protest. Artists did so by creating the work in a factory, expressing a strict opposition between the built and the non-built. By the late 60's the land artists (mentioned prior) flipped these terms and began thinking of the not-landscape to mean architecture, and the not-architecture to simply mean the landscape. These artists began to feel that there could be work that fit into both realms. Krauss explains -

“Sculpture is no longer the privileged middle term between two things that it isn’t. Sculpture is rather only one term on the periphery of a field in which there are other, differently structured possibilities”.

In thinking of these contingencies, I’m interested in experimenting with the idea of the crossing boundaries of landscape *and* architecture within the term of sculpture. *Rural Decay Almanac* uses a vernacular of a certain kind of American outdoor architecture, and twists it on its side by bringing it into the gallery. The term ‘site’ in this work is taking on a few meanings: the site of the materials, the site of the gallery, and the imagined site where the objects perform. I’m not interested in pretending the gallery isn’t there, but rather using it as a blank slate for experimentation, another site and layer of the proposed idea. Throughout the exhibition, I activate the ceiling, floor space, and the walls; with the track giving *Almanac* its arch and movement, with the earth ring around the column in *Azimuth*, and with the rope projecting out of the space in *Gnomon*. The objects in the space project a mysterious function and footprint that suggests a much larger environment than the gallery by literally and figuratively expanding beyond and outside the room.

Mary Miss' 1977-78 work *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* is just one example from the land art movement that I relate *Rural Decay Almanac* to. Her amalgamation of interior/exterior and landscape/architecture concerned with site is a key note to the work, making this project one of the most important land art works. Miss' work is in fact the main trigger for the Rosalind Krauss text formerly mentioned. Miss created a 5 part sculpture over a four acre plot in Roslyn New York consisting of vertical tower structures, a mound, and an underground courtyard. The works relate to and depend on one another, as well as the viewer for their completion. There is an element of the unknown as the audience may not be those attuned to contemporary art, and there is no set path to discover the works. This notion leads to an element of surprise when the fragments makes sense as a whole in the end.

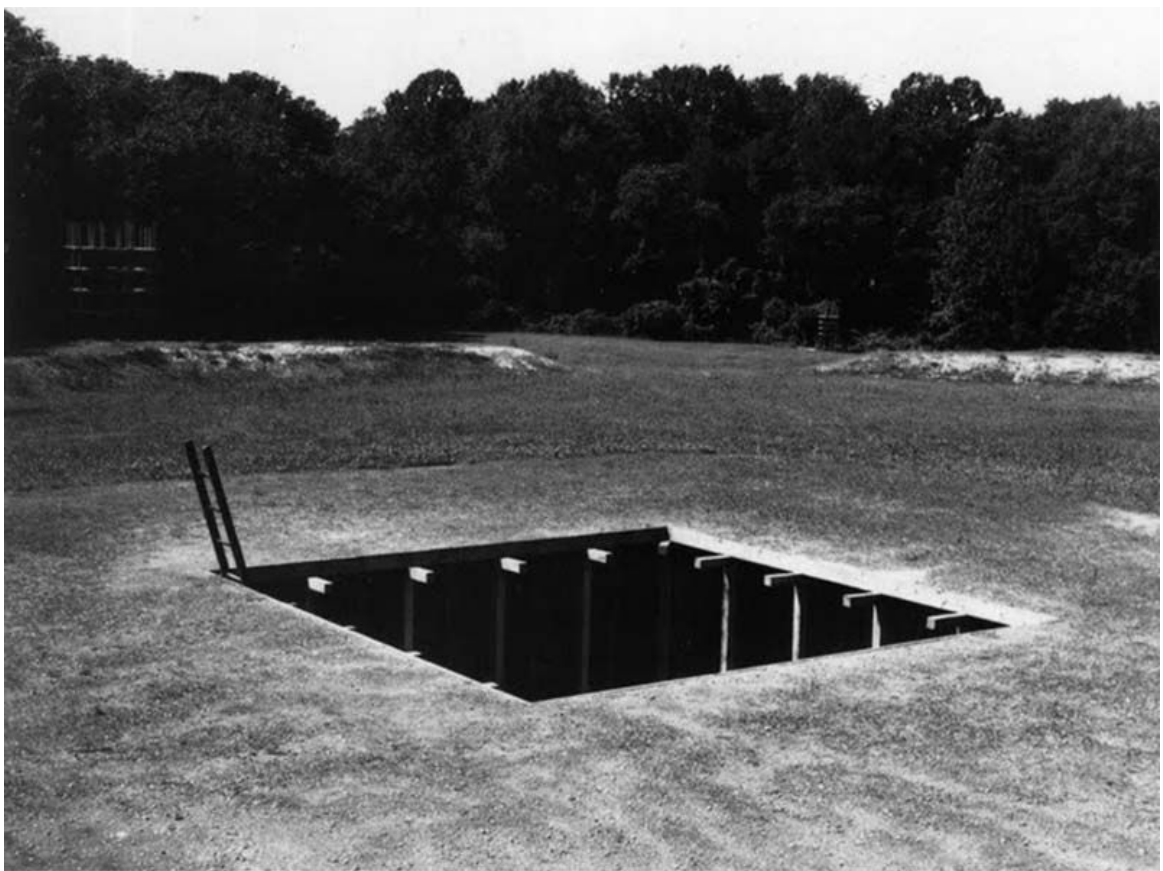


Figure 7. *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys*, Mary Miss, 1977-78

The Big Wheel from 1979 marked the beginning stages of Chris Burdens switch from performance based work to sculpture. His notable works before this included being crucified to a Volkswagen Beetle, or being shot in the arm in *SHOOT*. *The Big Wheel* is comprised of a 1968 Benelli motorcycle and a wooden frame that mounts a cast iron flywheel. When the bike is started and revved, the 3-ton wheel spins. He said of the work-

‘This exploration centers on the dichotomy that power can be attractive, comforting, and beautiful and, simultaneously, frightening and ominous.’ I relate to his work on many levels, but in this case I’m drawing comparisons to his sense of scale, danger, performance, and function. This object acts, so-to-speak, and the viewer completes the work. When it was originally exhibited at the Rosamund Felson Gallery in New York in the 70’s, the viewer was invited to operate the motorcycle. Whether the movement is implied or literal, the atmosphere is much larger than the physical space it takes up in the danger it illustrates, the sound it projects, and the impact it leaves on the viewer.



Figure 8. *The Big Wheel*, Chris Burden, 1979

Chapter 4. Conclusion

Rural Decay Almanac suggests a space bigger than itself. The original site of the barn in IJamesville is forever changed. The ground be soft dirt for some time now - the kind of dirt that only happens after being suffocated underneath an object for years and years. The dirt can now breathe the air and feel sun and wind. Adjacent to the flat plane where the barn was, the terrain begins to slope downward towards a modest pond. The homeowners will perhaps soon forget that the structure ever existed. Maybe some new trees will grow there over 100 more years and a farmer might mill them into lumber and create a workspace for himself. Maybe it will collect rubble, dust, and debris as he gets distracted by life. Maybe it will catch fire, or collapse under a heavy snow, or tumble in a landslide, or maybe it will live until its end and become another kind of almanac.